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ROUNDHOUSE

NMRA British Region 80th Anniversary issue

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Pete Leach MMR® #649

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CSX 999 leads a southbound coal train bound for Spartanburg SC out of Bus Pass Tunnel after crossing the Blue Ridge Mountains in North Carolina. A northbound Manifest train is heading for Erwin from E. Vostic Yard whilst the Line Superintendent has parked his Hi-rail awaiting permission to continue his inspection of the line after the trains have passed
photo by Pete Colton



National Model Railroad Association
British Region - "sharing know-how"



1945 - 2025
80TH
ANNIVERSARY

Seaboard Southern Model Railroad Group

Malcolm Dickie, Richard de Costobadie and Julian Charatan

SEABOARD
SOUTHERN
MODEL RAILROAD GROUP

Challenger passing Penland Post Office - Photos by Julian Charatan

In October 2022 Seaboard Southern had a declining and ageing membership down from 24 in 2018 to just 16, of which only 12 were regular club attendees. By 2023, our membership had declined to only 13, of which only 10 were regular attendees. However, these members possessed a lot of modelling skills and enthusiasm.

We agreed at our 2023 AGM that increasing membership was a priority, 90% of club members were retired. Our typical recruitment process was to have a club stand at our annual show, at best this only generated one or two new members. This only kept our numbers stable as older members moved away to be closer to their children and grandchildren or unfortunately passed away. A new approach was needed.

The club committee tasked the Secretary (me) to come up with a progressive but simple strategy. First step was to

redesign our 'first contact' form for prospective new members. This contained all important personal information. However, the essential element was a prompt follow up phone call and / or e-mail inviting the prospective member to a club night. This strategy bought limited success but we needed more. At this time, I approached Gordy Robinson and said I would like to get involved in some NMRA activities / projects. Gordy asked me to join the MRP project (Membership Retention Programme) in mid 2023. This existing group was based in the USA in the Chicago and Pacific Northwest regions. We met with bi-weekly Zoom calls. They too clearly had issues recruiting and retaining NMRA Members in the USA.

As a group we identified the strategies and processes required to both recruit, but more importantly, retain members. Whilst this project was specific to the NMRA, the same principles apply to individual model railroad clubs.

These principles were applied to our September 2024 annual show. We utilised the knowledge gained from the MRP project, strong advertising in the popular model railway monthly magazines, e-mailing previous open day attendees plus our now popular clubroom open days on a Saturday – we had strong foundation plans in place to increase our membership. As a result, club members worked together to acquire 8 new members by Christmas. Virtually all of them were younger than the existing members with excellent railway modelling skills – a great result. Our Club membership increased significantly from 13 to 21 in total. These new members in conjunction with the excellent 2024 NMRA Convention at Cookham in Berkshire has rejuvenated Seaboard Southern. We now have members working on 3 major club layouts as follows:

CLINCHFIELD – HO scale

This layout was covered by an extensive article published in Roundhouse magazine in 2022. However, since then Clinchfield has acquired much scenery, still lots to do. Major scenic work undertaken by Andrew Baird, Barry Richardson, John Sharpe, Neil Henry, Ian Palmer. A lot of additional signalling has been installed along with 'block sections'. We have also introduced operational running days on the first Saturday of each month. This involves extensive train running with (currently) basic switching cards utilising a Despatcher, Yard Master and 4 or 5 Engineers. At lunchtime we stop for a Cornish pasty lunch and good conversation. These sessions are great for developing friendships, welcoming prospective new members and improving Railroad Operations knowledge.



GP15s 1503 and 1522 lean into the 2% grade as they start the climb from the Piedmont into the Blue Ridge Mountains. They will enter the Bus Pass Tunnel

CLINCHFIELD LAYOUT

Layout Name	Clinchfield
Scale	HO
Layout size	18 ft x 14 ft
Prototype	Clinchfield Railroad North Carolina
Locale	Spruce Pine, Penland
Era	1950s to 1990s
Style	Walk in, two levels, continuous run with point to point
Layout height	Level 1 – 36 inches, Level 2 – 62 inches
Mainline run	450 ft
Track	PECO code 83
Point motors	DCC Concepts
Minimum radius	Mainline 36 inches, Yards 30 inches
Turnouts (min)	Mainline #7, Yards #5
Maximum grade	2%
Control	DCC NCE Pro Cab
Operators	Dispatcher, Yard Master plus 4 or 5 Engineers

Seaboard Southern Model Railroad Group has progressed a long way since 2022. In addition to our stronger and more youthful membership, our clubroom is open on Wednesdays from 10 am for those members who dislike driving at night. Our regular club meetings are Tuesday 2pm until 6pm, Fridays 2pm until 9pm. More members are becoming involved in FREEMO meets. As a club, we will again be involved with organising the 2026 NMRA Convention in Cookham.



Rear-end pushers help an empty coal train past the Warren Crossover towards Penland on the approach to Blue Ridge Summit



Clinchfield Challenger 670 nears the top of the climb to the Blue Ridge

We are in the process of changing our website to make it more user friendly and up to date. [Seaboard-Southern.org.uk](https://seaboard-southern.org.uk), in addition, are also improving our presence on social media plus setting up our own You Tube channel accessed via our new website. Our first Saturday of the month operational sessions are becoming very popular. As a result, we are now having joint meetings with the Kent and East Sussex group. Currently, we are considering setting up 'scenic workdays' on the third Saturday of each month.

We are a very friendly club located 2 minutes from Junction 11 on the M23. All new potential members will be made most welcome. We have our own clubroom 24/7 with plenty of free parking.

If any NMRA members wish to visit, please e-mail me at secretaryseaboard-southern@gmail.com

Malcolm Dickie

Seattle and Northern RR: A fictitious Great Northern layout in On30

My original O scale narrow gauge layout dated from 2016, and was my first attempt at a layout of my own. I'd been involved with a couple of American projects at the MRC in London, and later at Seaboard Southern. A move from London to East Sussex gave me enough space for what was intended to be an HO scale layout based loosely on the GN in Washington state until a club colleague introduced me to On30 (O scale 1:48 in narrow gauge). I was so taken with it that I scrapped all my plans and started again! This was quite a big call given that I'd spent a few years collecting over 800 freight cars and the locomotives to pull them, but I suppose that's the price of

learning. I have no regrets at the switch.

I always intended that the layout would be something that I could enjoy with other NMRA members and club colleagues, and some wonderful friends at Seaboard gave me many hours of their time on the building side, as that has never been my thing. Layout design and operations have always been my interests; building, for me, is just the tiresome bit in the middle.

The original layout (called the Great Northern and Skagit River RR) was housed in a rebuilt garden cabin with a 288 sq ft footprint, which gave enough space for a double deck around-the-walls style affair with a central peninsula for the connecting helix.

This was a steep learning curve for all of us, and provided valuable lessons for me when, after a lengthy break during the pandemic and a couple of subsequent years building up car card and waybill-based operations, I realised that the layout no longer met my aspirations. I wasn't spending any time in the cabin between monthly operating sessions, so I sat down and worked out what the problems were, and how they could be resolved.

Most of them stemmed from my own inexperience, including design errors which could not be easily fixed. Principal among these was the lack of a continuous run, so I eventually made the tough decision to rip out the layout and build another one. It did feel something of a nuclear option at the time, but once the old layout had gone to the great skip in the sky I knew it was the right decision.

Among the objectives for layout 2.0 was the need to recycle as much of the material from the old layout as possible, including wooden benchwork (albeit greatly changed), wiring and track, as well as sticking with the original Digitrax control equipment and (mostly) Bachmann On30 stock.

That has all been successfully done. At the time of writing in early summer 2025 the cabin is full of completed benchwork on three (!) levels with just the helix to go. I decided to employ a professional carpenter to do this part of the project, which meant that the benchwork is of far better quality than I could have done myself, and has saved many months, or probably years, or construction.

SEATTLE & NORTHERN RR

Layout Name	Seattle & Northern
Scale	On30
Layout size	16 ft x 18 ft
Prototype	Freelanced
Locale	Washington State
Era	Late 1940s
Style	Walk in, multi-deck, continuous run with point-to-point for operations
Layout height	31" to 76", with maximum operations height 58"
Mainline run	520 ft (including helix)
Track	PECO code 100
Minimum radius	Mainline 24 inches, mostly 30 inches
Turnouts (min)	Mainline #8 long
Maximum grade	2.75%
Control	Digitrax DCC
Operators	Dispatcher plus four engineers using car cards and waybills

All the backscenes are in and painted (it was a mistake not to have done this early on first time around) and the team from Seaboard is about to start track laying. I have spent a considerable amount of time planning and testing lighting as I need this in place before the main build starts. Again, this was a major oversight on the first layout.

Operations on the now-renamed Seattle and Northern RR will be on a traditional point-to-point basis, with staging at both east and west ends. The continuous run option will be available at other times. It's worth noting that I've tripled the available staging from the first layout; NEVER overlook the importance of staging, as it underpins everything you'll run in the future! Industries along the way will include a brewery, a lumber plant, agricultural outlets and general freight, to name but



We are embarking upon building the biggest On30 layout in the country

a few. These are mostly driven by rolling stock I already own, and will work well in our late-1940s era. We'll keep the barge operation from the first layout as it's an excellent way to stage stock on and off the layout between operating sessions as well as being popular with the operators.

Building will, no doubt, take longer than we'd like, but when trains do start rolling again I look forward to welcoming friends back for many more hours of fun together. It's what it's all about.

And the main lesson for me? What was once right didn't stay that way, so I had to learn to be flexible in my thinking. In practice that meant stepping back before moving forward again. It will be well worth it in the end.

Richard de Costobadie

Birth of the Downtown Thruway in N Scale

What would possess a club which is still busily working on its substantial HO scale railroad, and which already had a 'perfectly formed' n-scale layout, to launch an ambitious new n-scale project?

I can only say that an 'irresistible force' seemed at play. Perfectly formed as the N Scale layout is, it is quite small – about 8ft in length – with very tight, 8 inch radius curves in a continuous circuit. Lovely for short branch-line trains but not something to run an intermodal train on or any loco bigger than an RS2 / GP7 or Mogul or cars longer than the average felled log... Besides, strictly the club didn't 'own' it nor had we built it.

While we'd taken the layout 'on tour' many a time, the feeling was growing that we needed 'something else' to 'have something different'. At the same time, we felt we needed something to 'showcase' the club and expand its appeal beyond just HO modellers.

Then our ranks were swelled by some very welcome new joiners, several of whom revealed they were n-scalers. At around the same time we were fortunate to have had a very generous donation of n-scale track, turnouts and buildings from an estate and baseboards from a previous, abandoned project. The time, therefore, seemed ripe to begin our N Scale adventure.

Over a series of popularly attended club meetings we established our goals and

evolved a set of 'givens and druthers': We agreed:

- To build an n-scale layout which was in part transportable for use at shows, but which would 'seemlessly' integrate into a larger, permanent layout at the club.
- To use as much of the donated materials as we could
- That the 'on tour' portion of the layout should be built to be reliable, robust and maintainable and could be run, if necessary, by a single operator
- We'd do our best to have something working and visible for our show (even though, as it turned out, we weren't to have a show...)
- The layout should be a 'showstopper'...

The first four goals were agreed relatively easily and quickly. No eyes were gouged nor hair pulled, and no-one got shouted at on the way! (I did say we're a happy club!) The last one, though, did cause a teeny pause for thought...

Over several sessions, pictures of other layouts were studied, numerous ideas were floated, mulled over and then put on the back burner. Nothing really seemed to 'grab' us and shout 'Me! I'm the one you should build!!!'

Then, after much scanning of magazines, online forums and sites (not all of them railroad related. But I digress...) an 'old' idea of mine rumbled out of the dusty spaces of my mind...

Inspired by a visit long ago to New York and a walk along the old West Side Railroad (aka now as the 'High Line') it occurred to me that a 'downtown thruway' could be something to get excited about.

I rooted out some old photos of said line, feverishly worked up a plan, set to work putting together a mock-up of the idea (in half n-scale, out of cardboard and polystyrene and little sleep!) and a presentation 'deck' and, nervously, put it all before the members...

Fortunately, it was met with delight. They liked it! We had a 'goer'! Now all we have to do is... Get on with it!

Update: Track and building plans are being finalised, a budget agreed and a working group assembled. We are close to actually laying track!!

Julian Charatan